

Compression stockings and wraps

What are compression stockings and wraps?

Compression stockings, also known as graduated compression stockings or hosiery, are elasticated stockings which give support to your legs. The compression applied by the stockings is greater at the ankle and reduces towards the knee. Compression comes in different strengths or classes and can be knee length or thigh length depending on your condition and prescription.

Compression wraps are an alternative to stockings or bandages. They are designed for ease of application and removal. The wrap can be either a calf piece alone or used in conjunction with foot or thigh wraps. Your nurse/doctor will advise which is suitable for you.

How do compression stockings and wraps work?

Compression stockings and wraps apply pressure to your legs, which increases the blood flow in the veins back up to the heart. Improving the blood flow in your veins helps to prevent pooling of blood in the legs and reduce swelling.

What are the benefits of compression stockings?

Wearing compression stockings or wraps may improve symptoms associated with:

- Varicose veins
- An open or healed leg ulcer
- Swollen legs due to different causes such as pregnancy, lymphoedema or general immobility
- Deep vein thrombosis

Wearing compression stockings after a leg ulcer has healed may help to prevent recurrence.

How often should the stockings or wraps be replaced?

Stockings need to be replaced regularly (every three to six months) to ensure they provide adequate compression. Once compression stockings are prescribed you will usually need to wear them life-long unless advised otherwise.

Compression wraps should be replaced every six months.

Your GP or nurse will be able to arrange further stockings or wraps for you.

Possible complications from wearing compression garments

If you experience any new symptoms of pins and needles in the feet, numbness, discolouration or experience a skin reaction, remove the compression and seek advice from your nurse/doctor.

If your leg increases in size and the stockings or wrap become too tight, they may cause skin damage. If you lose weight and your legs change shape, the compression stockings may become

too loose and may not be effective. In any of these circumstances, contact your nurse to be remeasured for different sized stockings or wraps.

Additional advice

- Avoid standing still for long periods. If this cannot be avoided, exercise your calf muscle pump by taking the weight off your heels and standing on tip toe, then rolling back onto your heels with your toes off the ground. This will encourage the venous blood supply to return to the heart.
- When you are resting, elevate your legs.
- Excess body weight puts extra pressure on the veins and the lymphatic circulation in the legs. It is important to eat a healthy, well balanced diet, including fruit and vegetables.
- Ensure your skin is moisturised with a non-fragrant ointment or cream. Apply ointment in a downward motion in the evening after removing your stockings, or as often as necessary. Some paraffin-based products may be flammable to please follow the manufacturer's instructions.
- Avoid injury to your legs as any injury may cause a wound which may take a long time to heal.
- Walk or exercise regularly as this will help to keep the calf and foot muscle pump working properly. If you are immobile, perform foot and ankle exercises by moving your feet up and down, and rotating them around.
- Compression should be worn during waking hours. There are various aids available to assist in applying and removing your stockings and your nurse can give you more information about these if required.

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